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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000649

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [SZ](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA PUTS THE SQUEEZE ON SWITZERLAND AND HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: HAVANA 639 AND 616 (NOTAL)

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Chief of Mission met October 27 with Swiss ambassador Peter Burkhard, at Burkhard's request, to discuss the November 11-13 visit of a Swiss MFA delegation for their annual bilateral meeting with the GOC focused on bilateral and multilateral issues, including human rights. Last year's meeting was in Switzerland. The delegation includes a Swiss Vice-Foreign Minister (number 3 in the MFA hierarchy) and Switzerland's Special Envoy for Human Rights.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Burkhard said he had planned to follow the same agenda as the last round in Havana in 2007: full delegation meetings on day one, site visits on day two, and a split schedule for the third day, with the VFM meeting with third country representatives (including USINT) and the Human Rights Envoy meeting with civil society. Burkhard met last Friday with MINREX to coordinate the official meetings, a meeting which he said went well until the end, when the tone turned frosty and he was informed that any meetings by any member of his delegation with "persons who do not truly represent Cuba" would have unspecified repercussions. The ambassador said he sought clarification, and an explanation as to what circumstances had changed since the 2007 visit, but received no satisfactory response. His MINREX interlocutors merely noted that other European (EU) countries were adhering to these restrictions and cited the visit of Spanish FM Moratinos and Croatian President Mesic as recent examples. Burkhard, who worked for the OSCE in Uzbekistan prior to his assignment in Havana, said he felt meetings with civil society were an important check upon what the delegation would hear from its GOC interlocutors. He has referred the issue to Bern, and asked the COM for advice.

¶3. (C) COM reviewed with Ambassador Burkhard the discussions we had with the GOC in finalizing arrangements for the recent visit of WHA DAS Bisa Williams, who met with GOC representatives and with civil society. He noted that we had informed the GOC that she would be meeting with civil society, as USG representatives do around the world. The result was a full range of meetings with GOC institutions and a luncheon hosted by DAS Williams at USINT with a broad spectrum of civil society representatives. There had been no negative repercussions thus far on USINT from the GOC even though reports of the luncheon leaked out to the press in the days afterwards. COM offered several potential scenarios under which the Swiss could undertake a similar meeting with civil society, and encouraged the ambassador to do so.

¶4. (C) Background: The ambassador noted that discussions

with the GOC on human rights had proceeded very positively for a year or so before turning around in the last four to five months. Last year's bilateral discussion had gone extremely well. Switzerland also participates in a quadrilateral forum for human rights discussions with Cuba, Norway, and Spain, the last round of which took place in May and was very positive, according to Burkhard (the Norwegian ambassador has told us the same). As a result, the GOS had allocated funding to develop cooperative human rights programs with Cuba and designated a human rights expert to come to the embassy here on a long-term TDY assignment. Burkhard said he had hoped, among other initiatives, to be able to develop Swiss visits to Cuban prisons as an alternative to the ICRC, which has been banned from Cuban prisons for two decades. All these plans have been frozen.

¶5. (C) Action request: We will be encouraging the Swiss embassy here to follow through with its plan to meet with civil society but also believe it would be useful for the GOS to hear the same message in Washington and in Bern. The GOC is in the midst of a full court press to convince other countries, particularly Europeans, to drop their interaction with civil society in Cuba.

FARRAR